うぶめのなつ
姑獲鳥の夏
1
原作 京極夏彦
Natsuhiko Kyogoku
作画 志水アキ
Aki Shimizu
怪

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The Summer of the Ubume

& KYOUGOKU NATSUHIKO
SHIMIZU AKI

Kyougoku Natsuhiko is one of Japan's best-known mystery/horror writers. His debut novel, "Ubume no Natsu", ("The Summer of The Ubume"), is the beginning of the award-winning "Kyougokudou" series that's been adapted into manga, anime and terrible movies. "The Summer of the Ubume" novel has a fantastic English translation by Alexander O. Smith, published by Vertical. The second novel of the series, "Mouryou no Hako" ("A Box of Demons"), was animated a few years ago with character designs by CLAMP. He's also known for his "Kousetsu Hyaku Monogatari" series (released in English as "Requiem from the Darkness") and the novel/anime "Loups=Garous."

You'll notice that the author's name is very similar to that of his hero, Chuuzenji "Kyougokudou" Akihiko... yeah, he's kind of a huge self-insert. The author also apparently cosplays his own character full-time. Like the fictional Kyougoku, he's kind of a *giant nerd.*

Shimizu Aki is best known as the artist of the "Suikoden III" and "Qwan." She's previously collaborated with Kyougoku on the "Hyakki Tsurezure Bukuro" manga, which is a spin-off to this series that focuses on Detective Enokizu.
(I'm scanlating that one, too.)

ひきがね
& TRANSLATION TYPESETTING SANA

What is this place?
THE SUMMER OF THE LIBLIME
I'm floating...
It's dark...
And quiet...
And warm...
Oh... this must be "Mother..."

CHAPTER 1
姑獲鳥の夏 1
うぶめのなつ
原作 京極夏彦
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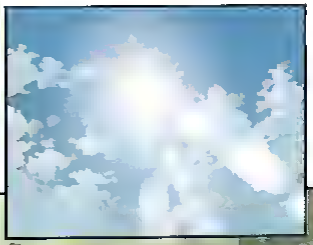
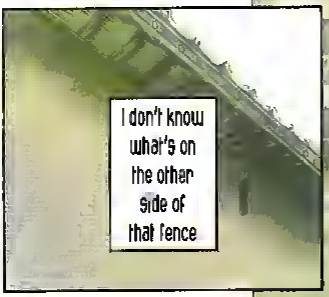
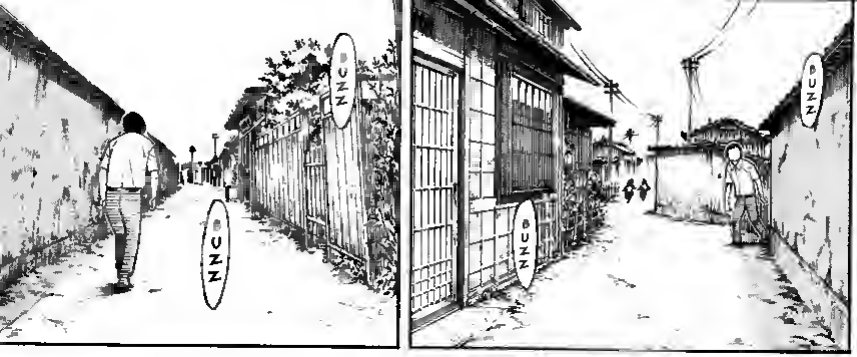


But I don't know the name of the road

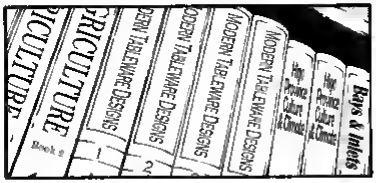
I don't even know if it has a name
oof!
climb


I don't know what's on the other side of that fence

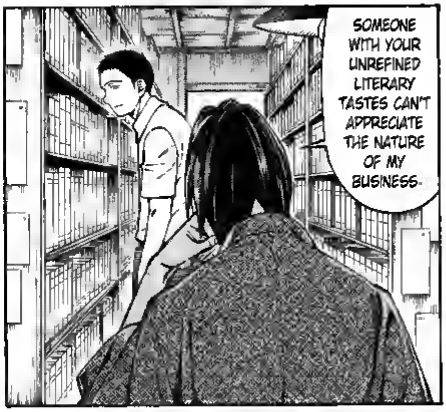
I walk up this hill all the time...
BUZZ
BUZZ
BUZZ



NOTE The sign says "Kyougokudou."


Rays & Inlets
MODERN TABLEWARE DESIGNS
MODERN TABLEWARE DESIGNS
MODERN TABLEWARE DESIGNS
RICULTURE
PICULTURE

Volume 1
Volume 2
Volume 3
Volume 4
Volume 5
Volume 6
Places 1
Places 2


SOMEONE WITH YOUR UNREFINED LITERARY TASTES CAN'T APPRECIATE THE NATURE OF MY BUSINESS.

...OI, KYOUGOKUDOU, DO YOU ACTUALLY SELL ANY OF THESE BOOKS, OR DO YOU JUST HOARD THEM?

TO PUT IT SIMPLY, SEKIGUCHI-KUN, I DEAL IN THE SORT OF BOOKS THAT OTHER USED BOOKSTORES DON'T.
SO I'M NEVER LACKING IN CUSTOMERS, WHETHER THEY BE SCHOLARS OR CURIOSITY-SEEKERS
I've been friends with Kyougokudou for over fifteen years
THAT'S HARSH...
IN ANY CASE, YOU WRITE FOR MAGAZINES SO TRASHY THAT YOU HAVE TO PUBLISH UNDER A PSEUDONYM, SO YOU HAVE NO ROOM TO CRITICIZE THE READING HABITS OF OTHERS
I BOUGHT EVERY BOOK HERE WITH MY OWN MONEY, SO I CAN DO WITH THEM AS I PLEASE.
SO YOU SAY... BUT DON'T YOU JUST BUY BOOKS SO YOU CAN READ THEM YOURSELF?
WHAT KIND OF MERCHANT ARE YOU?

OI, IS CHUUZENJI HERE?
His real name is Chuuzenji Akihiko, but I call him by the name of his store
Even when we were young, he always had his nose in a book
I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME OUT, BRO!
YOU SAVED MY ASS!
YOU'RE WELCOME

I'm a loser
There's no way he'd talk to somebody like me
Man...
You'd think he'd be shy, but he's pretty popular...

POUR
POUR
POUR
POUR
POUR
.....
I wonder if I should wait out this rain...
COME ON, SEKIGUCHI-KUN.
JOLT
WE LIVE IN THE SAME DIRECTION, RIGHT?
HEY, CHUUZENJI-KUN...
OH, UH...

I OFTEN SEE YOU READING THOSE WESTERN TEXT-BOOKS.
HUH?

YOU'RE INTERESTED IN PSYCHOLOGY, AREN'T YOU?

FREUD? WELL, HIS SCIENTIFIC INQUIRIES INTO THE NATURE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND HAVE SHAKEN THE ACADEMIC ESTABLISHMENT LATELY, SO HE'S AT LEAST SLIGHTLY INTERESTING.

OH, UM, WELL...
I'VE BEEN READING A LOT OF SIGMUND FREUD'S WORKS LATELY...

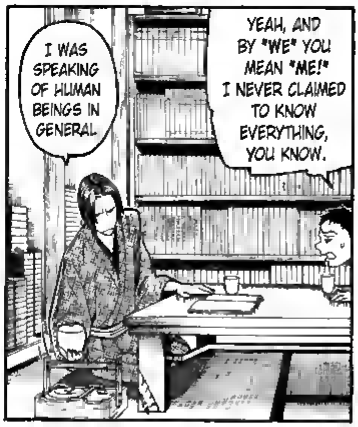
ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY HAS LONG HELD THAT THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND RULES OVER THE CONSCIOUS MIND, BUT WESTERN PHILOSOPHY HAS TRADITIONALLY
HAHA...
THE CONSCIOUS MIND AND THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND HAVE A RELATIONSHIP THAT'S AKIN TO THAT OF AN ENLIGHTENED MAN AND A THEOLOGIAN
HIS THEORY OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS IS SIMILAR TO THE BUDDIST IDEA OF "SATORI."

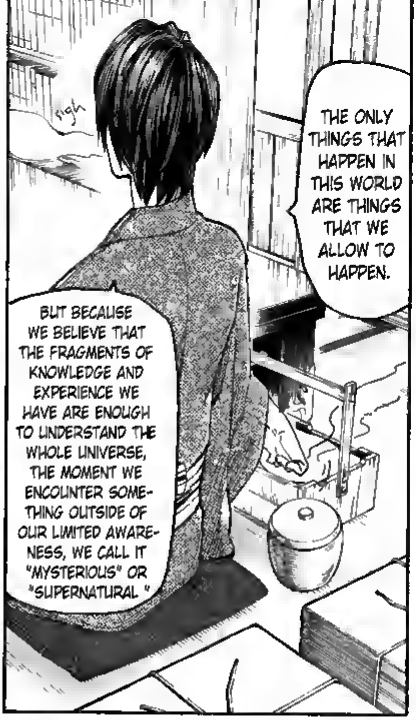
Even though we've both gotten married and settled down, we've stayed close all this time
HEY, KYOUGOKU-DOU...
Somehow we came to be good friends
SINCE YOU HAVE NO TASTE ANYWAY, I'LL JUST REUSE THESE OLD TEA LEAVES.
And now whenever we get together, we end up talking for hours.
DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE FOR A WOMAN TO BE PREGNANT FOR 20 MONTHS?
THUMP

...WHY DON'T YOU ASK A MIDWIFE OR A GYNE-COLOGIST?
OH, UM, I CAN'T...
ANYWAY, I HEARD THE STORY FROM A WOMAN, SO WOULDN'T SHE KNOW?
sigh

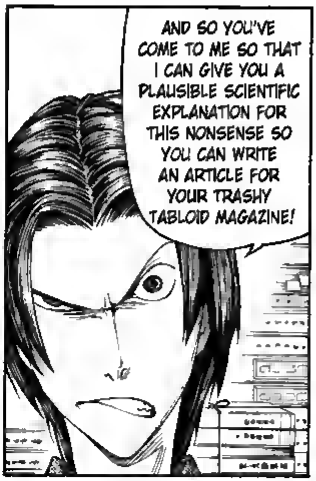
THEY SAY THAT HER STOMACH IS TWICE THE SIZE OF A NORMAL PREGNANT WOMAN'S...
BUT SHE'S SHOWN NO SIGN OF BEING ABOUT TO GIVE BIRTH...
ISN'T THAT A WILD STORY?
IT'S A REAL-LIFE MEDICAL MYSTERY!

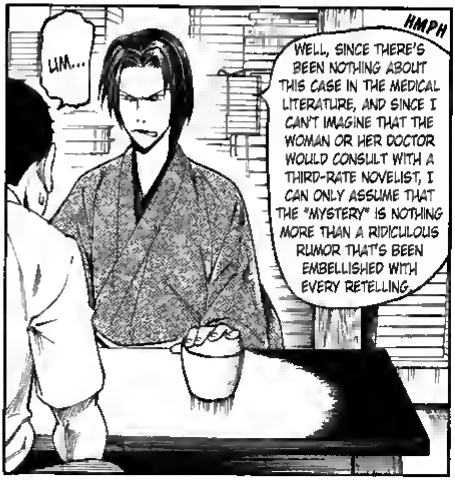
THERE ARE NO MYSTERIES IN THIS WORLD.


I WAS SPEAKING OF HUMAN BEINGS IN GENERAL
YEAH, AND BY "WE" YOU MEAN "ME!" I NEVER CLAIMED TO KNOW EVERYTHING, YOU KNOW.


sigh
THE ONLY THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN THIS WORLD ARE THINGS THAT WE ALLOW TO HAPPEN.
BUT BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT THE FRAGMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WE HAVE ARE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE UNIVERSE, THE MOMENT WE ENCOUNTER SOMETHING OUTSIDE OF OUR LIMITED AWARENESS, WE CALL IT "MYSTERIOUS" OR "SUPERNATURAL."

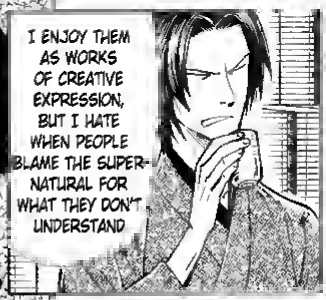
WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT THE WAY HUMAN BEINGS THINK!?


AND SO YOU'VE COME TO ME SO THAT I CAN GIVE YOU A PLAUSIBLE SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION FOR THIS NONSENSE SO YOU CAN WRITE AN ARTICLE FOR YOUR TRASHY TABLOID MAGAZINE!


HMPH
WELL, SINCE THERE'S BEEN NOTHING ABOUT THIS CASE IN THE MEDICAL LITERATURE, AND SINCE I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT THE WOMAN OR HER DOCTOR WOULD CONSULT WITH A THIRD-RATE NOVELIST, I CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT THE "MYSTERY" IS NOTHING MORE THAN A RIDICULOUS RUMOR THAT'S BEEN EMBELLISHED WITH EVERY RETELLING.
UM...

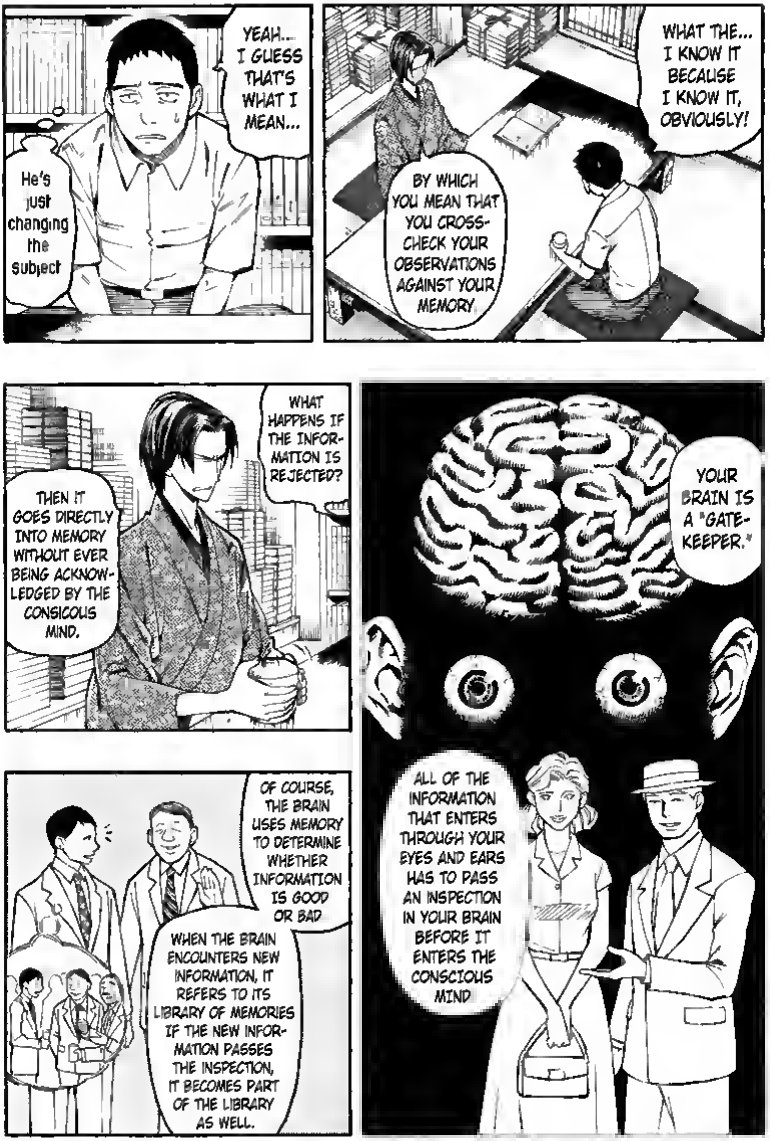
Believe it or not, Kyougokudou actually has three jobs
His main job, of course, is selling books. He's also the priest of his family's old shrine.
But in his side job, he's an exorcist who deals with hauntings and spirit possessions

I THOUGHT YOU LIKED GHOST STORIES, THOUGH?
THAT'S... QUITE AN ACCUSATION...
But he's not wrong...


I ENJOY THEM AS WORKS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION, BUT I HATE WHEN PEOPLE BLAME THE SUPERNATURAL FOR WHAT THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND

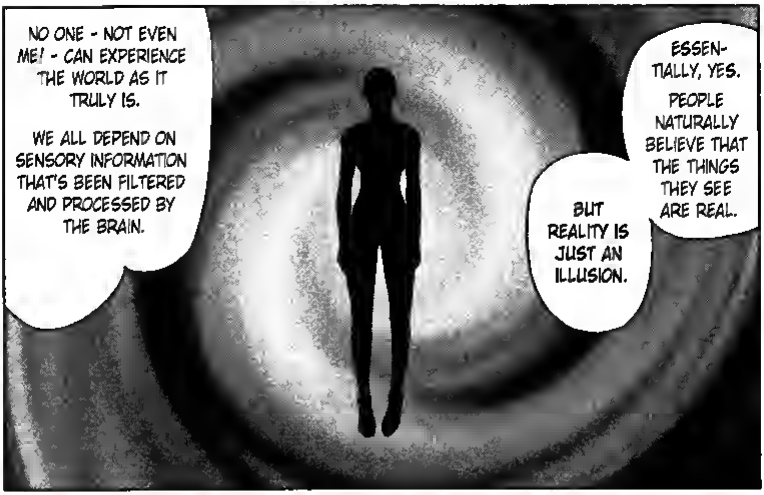
I HEAR YOU'VE MADE QUITE A BUSINESS OUT OF IT
BUT DON'T YOU CLAIM TO BE AN EXORCIS-

THEY'RE REAL, BUT THEY DON'T EXIST.
AND THEREFORE THEY AREN'T RECOGNIZED BY SCIENCE.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO GOES OUT AND WAVES A MAGIC STICK TO CURE PEOPLE OF HAUNTINGS AND POSSESSIONS
ISN'T IT HYPOCRITICAL TO CLAIM THAT GHOSTS AREN'T REAL?
HUH?
What?
OH, THEY ARE REAL.
YOU CAN SEE THEM, YOU CAN FEEL THEM, YOU CAN HEAR THEM.
ARE YOU SAYING THAT GHOSTS ARE REAL OR THAT THEY'RE NOT REAL?
WELL, LATELY THERE'S BEEN AN INTEREST IN SO-CALLED "PSYCHIC SCIENCE," BUT THAT'S A CONTRADICTION IN ITSELF.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S BEING CONTRADICTORY!
WELL, FOR INSTANCE...
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT I'M REALLY THE OWNER OF THE KYOUGOKUDOU BOOKSTORE?

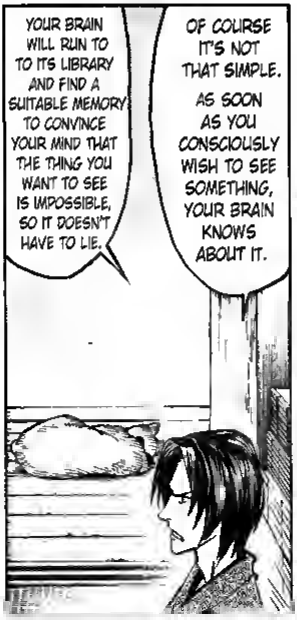

YEAH... I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I MEAN...
He's just changing the subject
WHAT THE... I KNOW IT BECAUSE I KNOW IT, OBVIOUSLY!
BY WHICH YOU MEAN THAT YOU CROSS-CHECK YOUR OBSERVATIONS AGAINST YOUR MEMORY.
WHAT HAPPENS IF THE INFORMATION IS REJECTED?
THEN IT GOES DIRECTLY INTO MEMORY WITHOUT EVER BEING ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE CONSCIOUS MIND.
YOUR BRAIN IS A "GATEKEEPER."
ALL OF THE INFORMATION THAT ENTERS THROUGH YOUR EYES AND EARS HAS TO PASS AN INSPECTION IN YOUR BRAIN BEFORE IT ENTERS THE CONSCIOUS MIND
OF COURSE, THE BRAIN USES MEMORY TO DETERMINE WHETHER INFORMATION IS GOOD OR BAD
WHEN THE BRAIN ENCOUNTERS NEW INFORMATION, IT REFERS TO ITS LIBRARY OF MEMORIES IF THE NEW INFORMATION PASSES THE INSPECTION, IT BECOMES PART OF THE LIBRARY AS WELL.

WOULD YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND KNOW WHETHER THAT INFORMATION WAS RELIABLE?
AH, BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BRAIN IS A DISHONEST INSPECTOR?
WHAT IF IT SMUGGLES IN SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T BELONG?
I SEE...
IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE
SOMETIMES THE BRAIN IS JUST TRYING TO MANAGE AN AWKWARD SITUATION.
BUT WHY WOULD THE BRAIN BE DISHONEST IN THE FIRST PLACE?
THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
HUH... I GUESS NOT.
WITHOUT MEMORY, THE BRAIN IS HELPLESS.
SO THE BRAIN WOULD RATHER LIE TO THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAN ADMIT THAT IT DOESN'T KNOW SOMETHING.
WHAT IF YOUR BRAIN IS UNABLE TO MATCH SOMETHING TO ITS LIBRARY OF MEMORIES?

THE ACCOUNT BOOKS WILL BE OUT OF BALANCE
BUT IF THE BRAIN GETS INTO THE HABIT OF CHEATING THE CUSTOMER, EVENTUALLY CONTRA-DICTIONS WILL APPEAR.
BUT WHY WOULD THE CUSTOMER - THE MIND - WANT TO BE CHEATED?
SO THE BRAIN GOES BACK TO ITS LIBRARY AND FINDS A MOLDY OLD MEMORY THAT THE CUSTOMER MIGHT PREFER.
AFTER ALL, THE CONSCIOUS MIND HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT THE GOODS AREN'T FRESH!
OR WHAT IF THE CONSCIOUS MIND DOESN'T LIKE WHAT THE BRAIN IS OFFERING?
THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT, YOU KNOW.
?
OH, I GET IT NOW... THAT'S WHY PEOPLE SEE GHOSTS!
WELL, FOR INSTANCE, WHAT IF THE CUSTOMER DESPERATELY WANTED TO SEE A LOVED ONE WHO HAD DIED?

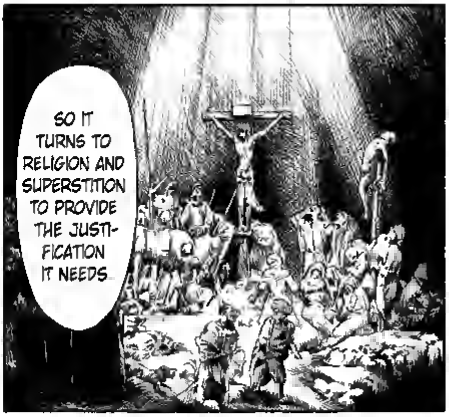

NO ONE - NOT EVEN ME! - CAN EXPERIENCE THE WORLD AS IT TRULY IS.
WE ALL DEPEND ON SENSORY INFORMATION THAT'S BEEN FILTERED AND PROCESSED BY THE BRAIN.
BUT REALITY IS JUST AN ILLUSION.
ESSENTIALLY, YES.
PEOPLE NATURALLY BELIEVE THAT THE THINGS THEY SEE ARE REAL.

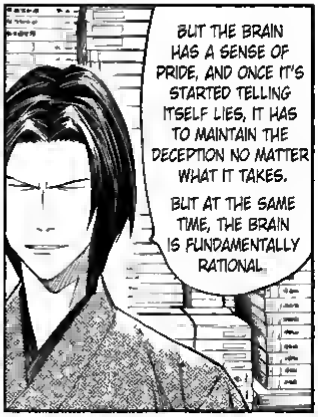
SO YOU HAVE TO UNCONSCIOUSLY WISH FOR SOMETHING IN ORDER TO SEE IT ..?
THAT'S RIGHT.


YOUR BRAIN WILL RUN TO TO ITS LIBRARY AND FIND A SUITABLE MEMORY TO CONVINCE YOUR MIND THAT THE THING YOU WANT TO SEE IS IMPOSSIBLE, SO IT DOESN'T HAVE TO LIE.
OF COURSE IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.
AS SOON AS YOU CONSCIOUSLY WISH TO SEE SOMETHING, YOUR BRAIN KNOWS ABOUT IT.

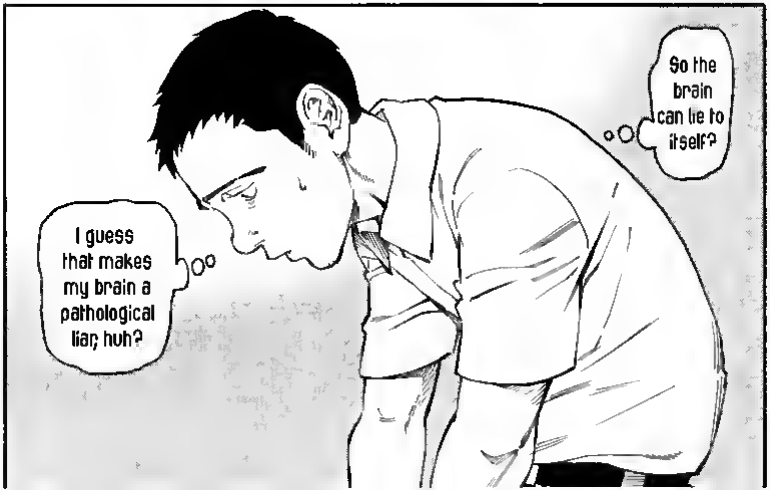
SO REALITY ISN'T REAL, HUH?
WOULDN'T THAT LEAD TO UTTER CHAOS?

SURELY THE MIND CAN'T JUST SEE THE THINGS IT WANTS TO SEE.
SOMETIMES I WISH I HAD THAT KIND OF IMAGINATION!

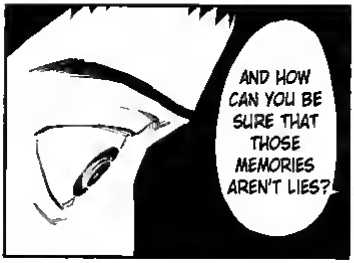

SO IT TURNS TO RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION TO PROVIDE THE JUSTIFICATION IT NEEDS


BUT THE BRAIN HAS A SENSE OF PRIDE, AND ONCE IT'S STARTED TELLING ITSELF LIES, IT HAS TO MAINTAIN THE DECEPTION NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.
BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THE BRAIN IS FUNDAMENTALLY RATIONAL.

EXACTLY!
SO RELIGION ACTS AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN THE LOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL SIDES OF THE BRAIN?
I SEE...

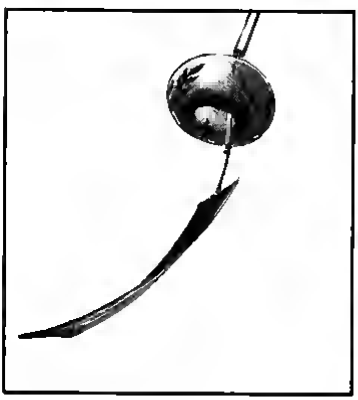

So the brain can lie to itself?
I guess that makes my brain a pathological liar, huh?

...HUH?
BY THE WAY, SEKIGUCHI-KUN, HOW IS YOUR GREAT-GRANDFATHER DOING?
ARE YOU CHANGING THE SUBJECT AGAIN?
NOT AT ALL. IT'S A SIMPLE QUESTION - HOW IS YOUR GREAT-GRANDFATHER?
AH, SO HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THAT HE EXISTED?
WELL, I'M HIS DESCENDENT, SO HE MUST HAVE EXISTED!
WHAT ABOUT YOUR GRANDFATHER? DID HE EXIST?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? HE DIED BEFORE I WAS EVEN BORN.

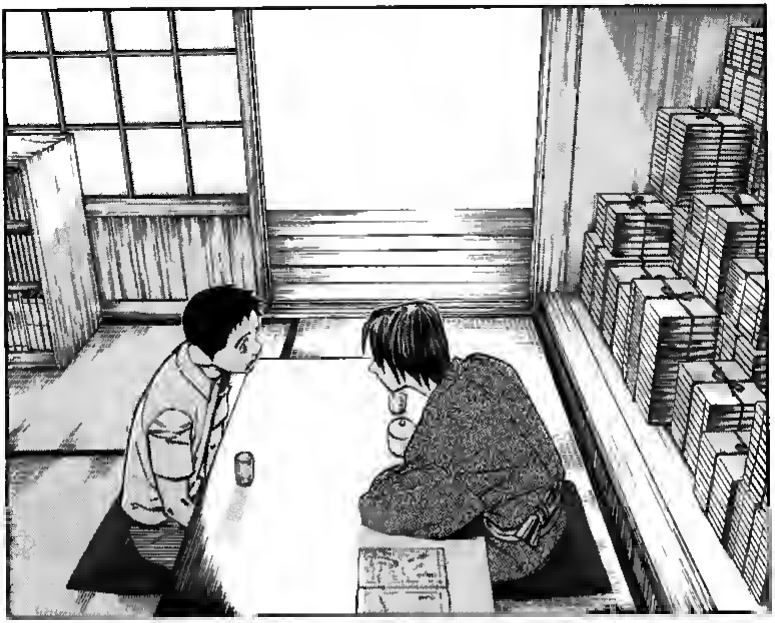

AND HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THAT THOSE MEMORIES AREN'T LIES?

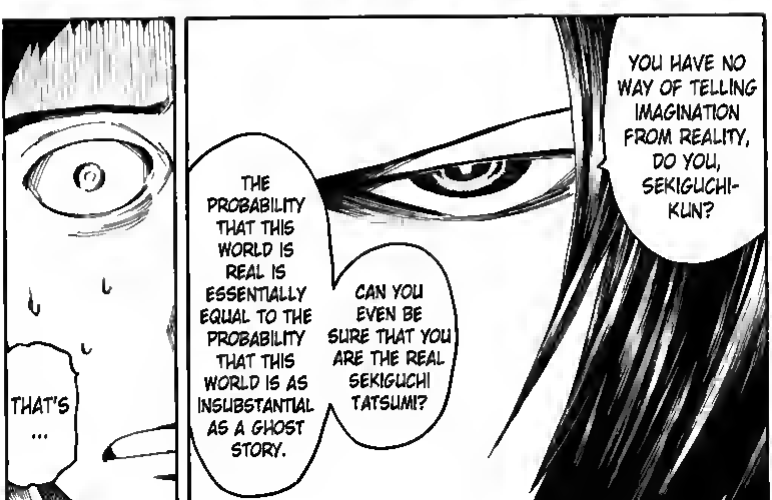
I BARELY REMEMBER HIM, BUT I KNOW HE EXISTED!
I THOUGHT I MENTIONED IT BEFORE - MY GRAND-FATHER DIED WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD!

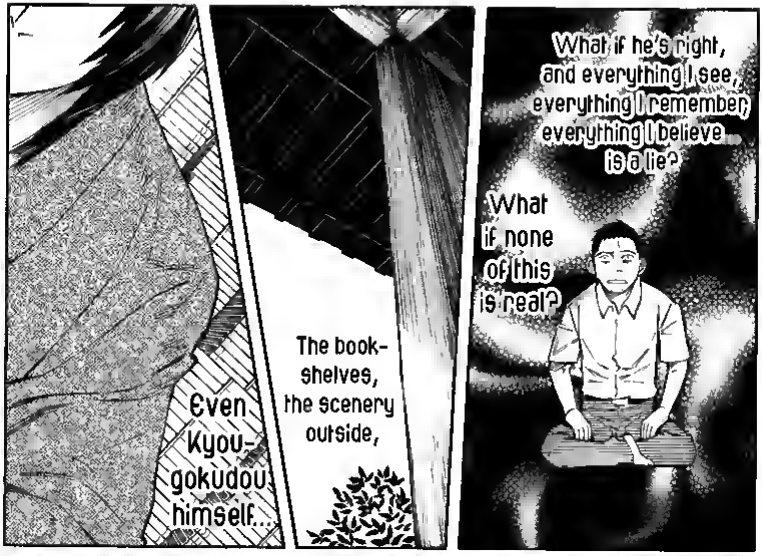
WHAT IF THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU WERE BORN INTO THIS WORLD JUST MOMENTS AGO, AND THAT EVERY MEMORY YOU HAVE OF YOUR OWN EXISTENCE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A LIE?



WHAT ...?



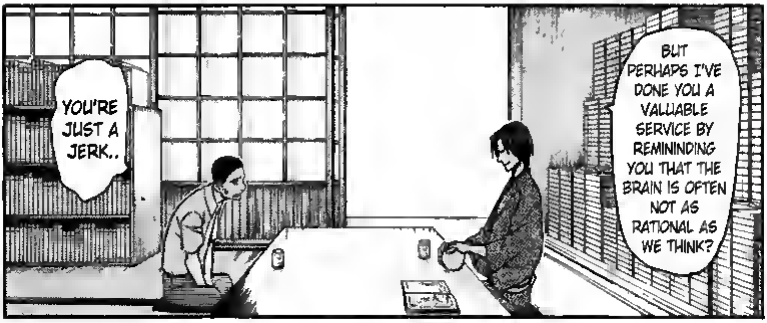

YOU HAVE NO WAY OF TELLING IMAGINATION FROM REALITY, DO YOU, SEKIGUCHI-KUN?
CAN YOU EVEN BE SURE THAT YOU ARE THE REAL SEKIGUCHI TATSUMI?
THE PROBABILITY THAT THIS WORLD IS REAL IS ESSENTIALLY EQUAL TO THE PROBABILITY THAT THIS WORLD IS AS INSUBSTANTIAL AS A GHOST STORY.
THAT'S ...


What if he's right, and everything I see, everything I remember, everything I believe is a lie?
What if none of this is real?
The book-shelves, the scenery outside,
Even Kyou-gokudou himself...

What if I'm not real...?
BUT THEN WHAT AM I!?
AM I A GHOST!?

PFFF!
PFFT!
HA
HA
HA
HA
I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY!
I HAD NO IDEA THAT YOU'D REACT SO STRONGLY!

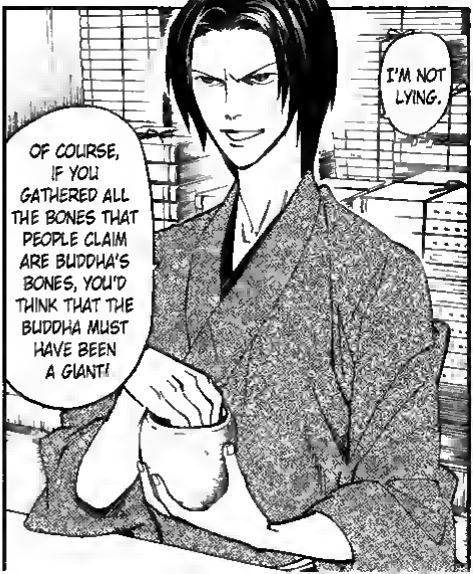
WERE YOU JUST PLAYING A TRICK ON ME!?
NO, I WAS GIVING YOU A DEMONSTRATION.
WHAT THE...
HAHA HAHA...
OH NO, YOU'RE DEFINITELY THE REAL SEKIGUCHI TATSUMI. I GUARANTEE IT.
SNORT
HEY, TAKE IT EASY ON ME! I FEEL LIKE I'VE HAD A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE...
I'M SORRY, REALLY.
HA HA HA
THIS IS THE METHOD THAT I USE TO EXORCISE "DEMONS" THAT POSSESS PEOPLE.
I ALSO JUST LIKE FUCKING WITH THEIR HEADS.


YOU'RE JUST A JERK..
BUT PERHAPS I'VE DONE YOU A VALUABLE SERVICE BY REMININDING YOU THAT THE BRAIN IS OFTEN NOT AS RATIONAL AS WE THINK?

LIAR! YOU'RE NOT EVEN A BUDDHIST!
OH YES, THESE ARE THE BONES OF BUDDHA!
OH, IT'S A BONE JAR.
A BONE JAR!?
BY THE WAY, WHAT'S IN THAT JAR YOU'VE BEEN FOOLING WITH?

GULP

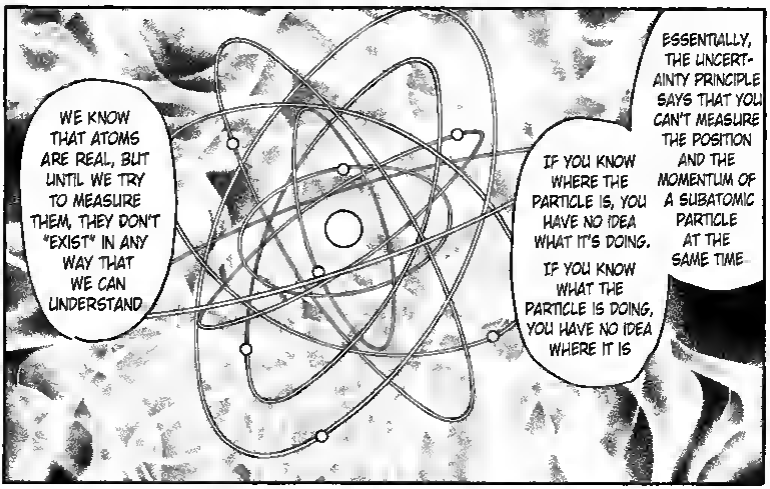
HEY!


I'M NOT LYING.
OF COURSE, IF YOU GATHERED ALL THE BONES THAT PEOPLE CLAIM ARE BUDDHA'S BONES, YOU'D THINK THAT THE BUDDHA MUST HAVE BEEN A GIANT!

OH, DID YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE ME?
GULP
THEY'RE NOT BONES, OF COURSE
IT'S CANDY FROM THE KANGETSUAN SWEET SHOP
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME?
IT KEEPS THEM FROM GOING STALE.
WHAT KIND OF WEIRDO KEEPS CANDY IN AN URN!?
...YOU'RE A TOTAL FRAUD, YOU KNOW?
NOT THIS SHIT AGAIN.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING WITH THIS STORY?
BUT UNTIL I OPENED THE LID, THERE WAS NO WAY TO KNOW WHETHER THE JAR HELD BONES OR CANDY, RIGHT?

QUANTUM MECHANICS IS A DISCIPLINE THAT SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOR OF SUBATOMIC PARTICLES.
A CORE TENET OF THE THEORY IS SOMETHING CALLED THE "UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE."
WE'VE BEEN DISCUSSING METAPHYSICS, SO I THOUGHT WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT PHYSICS.
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH QUANTUM MECHANICS?
NO, THAT WAS FOR PARTICLE PHYSICS.
OH, RIGHT... DIDN'T DR. YUKAWA WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR THAT LAST YEAR?

NOTE Hideki Yukawa won the Nobel Prize in 1949 for his work involving mesons.

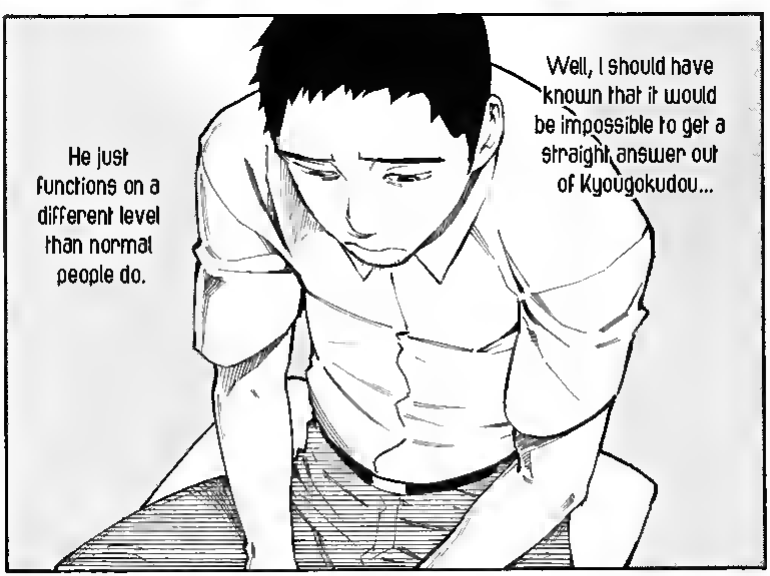

WE KNOW THAT ATOMS ARE REAL, BUT UNTIL WE TRY TO MEASURE THEM, THEY DON'T "EXIST" IN ANY WAY THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND
IF YOU KNOW WHERE THE PARTICLE IS, YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S DOING.
IF YOU KNOW WHAT THE PARTICLE IS DOING, YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHERE IT IS
ESSENTIALLY, THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE SAYS THAT YOU CAN'T MEASURE THE POSITION AND THE MOMENTUM OF A SUBATOMIC PARTICLE AT THE SAME TIME.

...SO THE JAR EXISTED IN A LIMBO BETWEEN TWO STATES UNTIL THE ACT OF OBSERVING DECIDED THAT IT WAS FILLED WITH CANDY?
SURE, IT'S AN INTERESTING IDEA, BUT WOULDN'T IT MAKE THE WORLD A BIT... UNSTABLE?
SO YOU COULD SAY THAT UNTIL I OPENED THIS JAR, THE CONTENTS WERE UNCERTAIN
IT COULD HAVE BEEN FULL OF CANDY, OR IT COULD HAVE BEEN FULL OF BONES.
WHOA, WHOA, ARE YOU SURE THAT'S ACTUALLY SCIENCE?
ISN'T THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE RATHER CONVENIENTLY TAILORED TO HUMAN BEINGS?
BUT IT IMPLIES THAT EVERYTHING - PAST AND PRESENT - IS RETRO-ACTIVELY CREATED THE MOMENT WE OBSERVE IT.
IF YOU FOLLOW QUANTUM THEORY TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION, THEN NOTHING "EXISTS" UNLESS IT IS BEING OBSERVED
WELL, GRANTED, THE THEORY IS CONTRO-VERSIAL...

WITHOUT HUMANS, THE UNIVERSE AS WE KNOW IT WOULD CEASE TO EXIST... AND IRONICALLY, SCIENCE IS BEGINNING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FACT.
THROUGH THE MAGIC OF WORDS, WE HUMAN BEINGS CAN CREATE UNIVERSES.

I'LL HAVE THE KITSUNE UDON, AND YOU CAN HAVE THE TANUKI SOBA.
ANYWAY, I THINK I'LL CLOSE EARLY AND GO GET DINNER FROM THE NOODLE SHOP NEXT DOOR.

NOTE The kitsune (fox) and tanuki (racoon) are rivals in Japanese mythology—the two creatures constantly challenge each other to battles of wit—, and the kitsune usually wins. "Kitsune udon" is a noodle dish topped with fried tofu skin, and "tanuki soba" is a noodle dish topped with bits of fried tempura batter.


Well, I should have known that it would be impossible to get a straight answer out of Kyougokudou...
He just functions on a different level than normal people do.

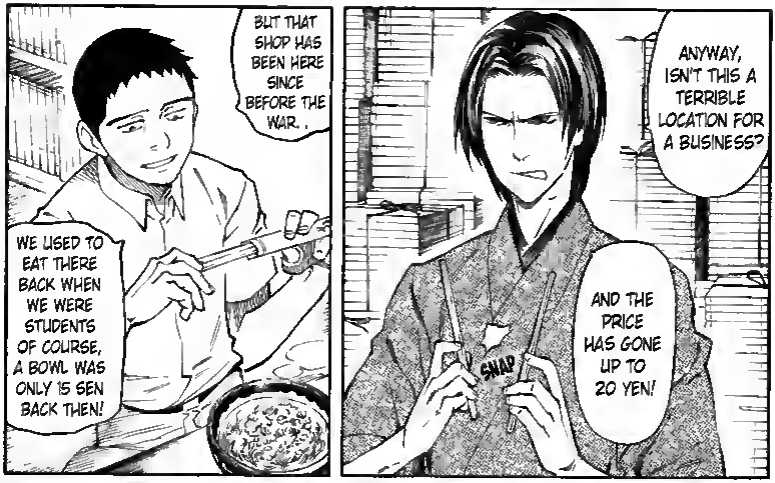
.....

jingle
jingle

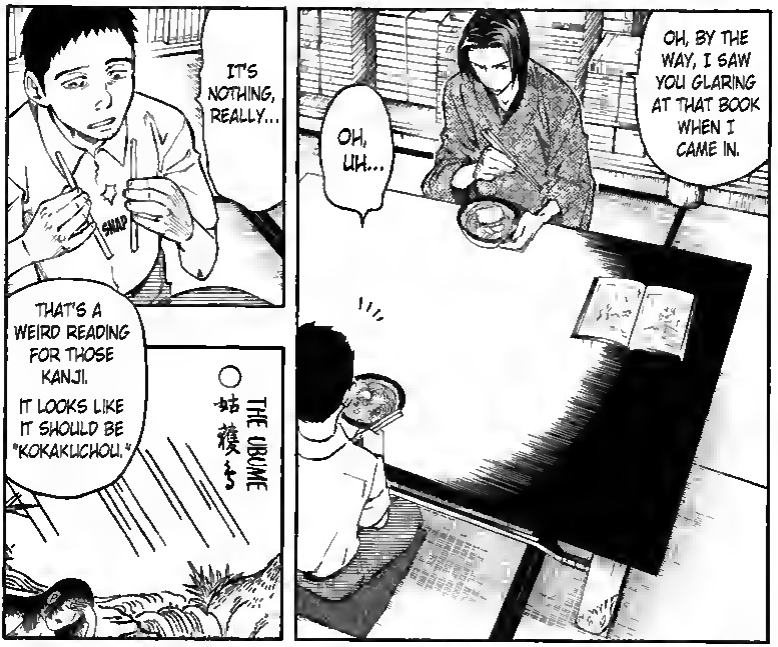
I'll make more tea...

TORIYAMA SEKIEN'S "NIGHT PARADE OF ONE HUNDRED DEMONS"

CREAK
I'M BACK.
Blood...
Is she hurt?
Y-YEAH.
DROP
YOU GOT THE TANUKI SOBA, RIGHT?
WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT? THE SHOP OWNER WAS BUSY SO I'M DELIVERLING MY OWN NOODLES

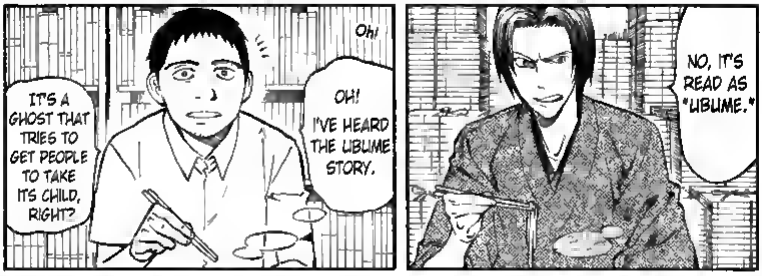

BUT THAT SHOP HAS BEEN HERE SINCE BEFORE THE WAR. .
WE USED TO EAT THERE BACK WHEN WE WERE STUDENTS OF COURSE, A BOWL WAS ONLY 15 SEN BACK THEN!
ANYWAY, ISN'T THIS A TERRIBLE LOCATION FOR A BUSINESS?
SNAP
AND THE PRICE HAS GONE UP TO 20 YEN!

NOTE A sen is 1/100th of a yen. After WWII, Japanese currency experienced high inflation rates.


IT'S NOTHING, REALLY...
SNAP
THAT'S A WEIRD READING FOR THOSE KANJI.
IT LOOKS LIKE IT SHOULD BE "KOKAKUCHOU."
○姑獲鳥 THE UBUME
OH, UH...
OH, BY THE WAY, I SAW YOU GLARING AT THAT BOOK WHEN I CAME IN.

NOTE "Ubume" is usually written as [産女] with the kanji for "birth" and "woman," but here it's written as [姑獲鳥] with the kanji for "mother-in-law," "steal" and "bird." It's a strange combination that Sekiguchi doesn't recognize, so he tries to sound it out based on the Chinese readings of the kanji.

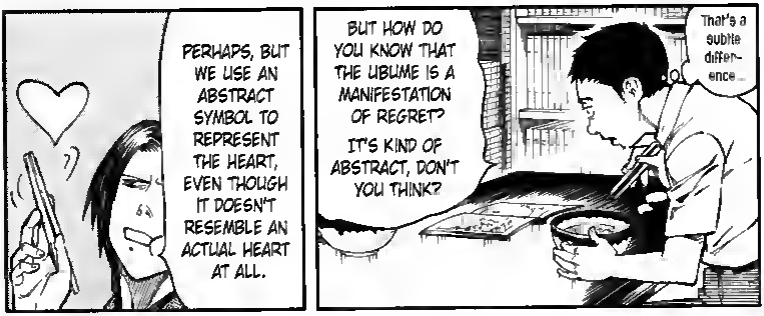
NOTE An "ubume" is said to be the ghost of a woman who died in childbirth, although sometimes it appears as an old woman as well. The ubume begs passerby to take its child, but when the person gets home, they realize that the "baby" is just a large rock.

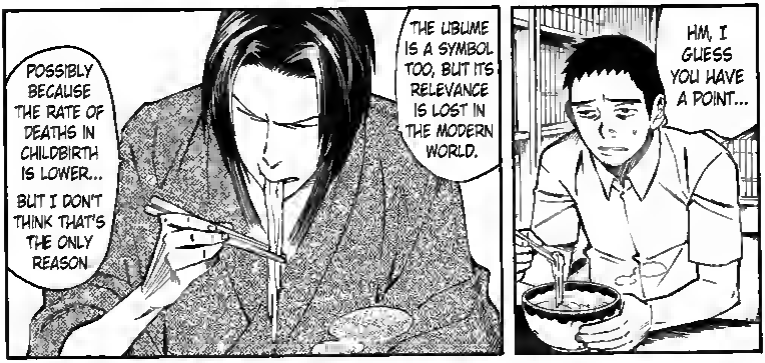


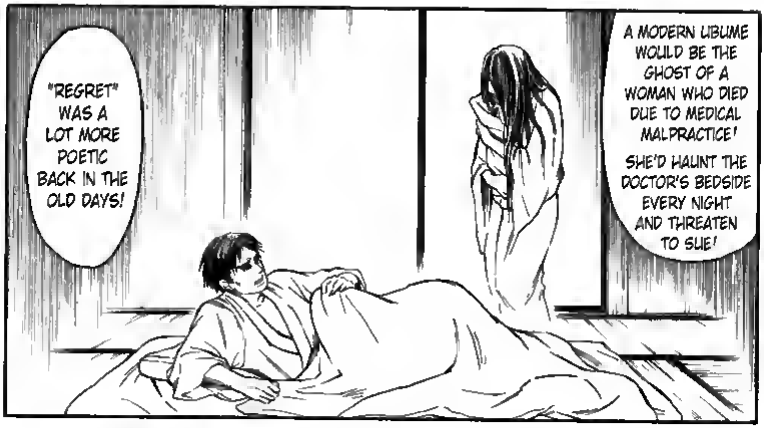
IT'S A SHAPESHIFTER WHEN IT PUTS ON ITS CAPE OF FEATHERS, IT BECOMES A BIRD; WHEN IT TAKES OFF THE CAPE IT BECOMES A WOMAN.
THERE'S A DEMON CALLED THE "KOKAKUCHOU" IN CHINESE LEGENDS - SOMETIMES IT'S ALSO KNOWN AS THE "NIGHT LADY" OR THE "HEAVENLY MAIDEN."

Don't talk with your mouth full!
UBUME ARE SUPPOSED TO BE THE GHOSTS OF WOMEN WHO DIE IN CHILDBIRTH, RIGHT?
WHILE THE UBUME TRIES TO GIVE AWAY HER CHILD.
Slurp
THE KO-KAKUCHOU ARE SAID TO STEAL CHILDREN AND RAISE THEM AS THEIR OWN.
THE UBUME IS MENTIONED IN "THE RECORD OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE TALES." I'M SURE THAT'S WHAT INSPIRED THE PAINTING, BUT THE STORY DOESN'T QUITE FIT..

A "GHOST" TRADITIONALLY TARGETS A SPECIFIC PERSON, BUT THE UBUME IS MORE OF A GENERAL REPRESENTATION OF REGRET.
NOT QUITE.
AN UBUME IS THE MANIFESTATION OF A DEAD MOTHER'S GRIEF AT BEING SEPARATED FROM HER CHILD.


PERHAPS, BUT WE USE AN ABSTRACT SYMBOL TO REPRESENT THE HEART, EVEN THOUGH IT DOESN'T RESEMBLE AN ACTUAL HEART AT ALL.
BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THE UBUME IS A MANIFESTATION OF REGRET?
IT'S KIND OF ABSTRACT, DON'T YOU THINK?
That's a subtle difference...


POSSIBLY BECAUSE THE RATE OF DEATHS IN CHILDBIRTH IS LOWER...
BUT I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE ONLY REASON.
THE UBUME IS A SYMBOL TOO, BUT ITS RELEVANCE IS LOST IN THE MODERN WORLD.
HM, I GUESS YOU HAVE A POINT...


"REGRET" WAS A LOT MORE POETIC BACK IN THE OLD DAYS!
A MODERN UBUME WOULD BE THE GHOST OF A WOMAN WHO DIED DUE TO MEDICAL MALPRACTICE!
SHE'D HAUNT THE DOCTOR'S BEDSIDE EVERY NIGHT AND THREATEN TO SUE!

HMM... THAT'S TRUE.
GOOD POINT.

YEAH, BUT CHILDBIRTH WAS MORE DANGEROUS THEN, AND PEOPLE DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND MEDICINE. SO IF A WOMAN DIED, SHE MIGHT HAVE REGRETS BUT SHE MIGHT NOT BLAME THE DOCTOR.

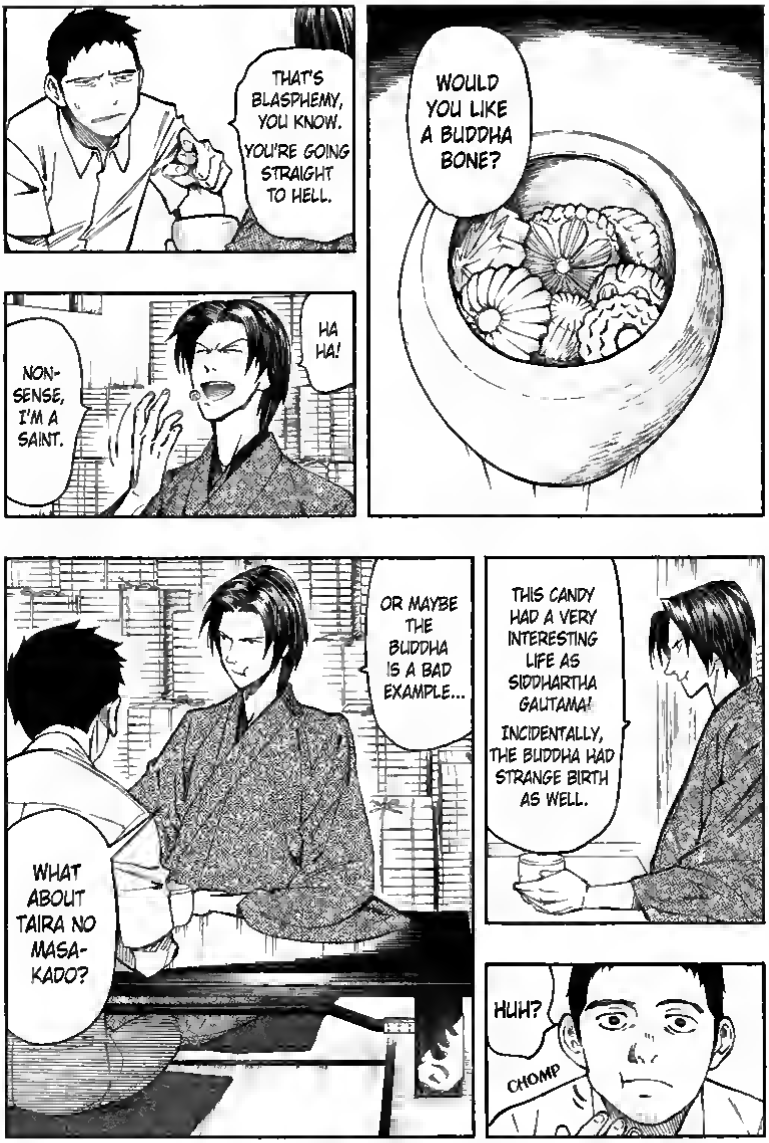
BUT HOW DID THE UBUME AND THE KOKAKUCHOU GET MIXED UP IN THE FIRST PLACE?
ONE OF THEM STEALS CHILDREN, AND THE OTHER GIVES CHILDREN AWAY.

sigh
GLUG
GLUG
SO WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE UBUME FINDS SOMEONE TO TAKE THE BABY?
NO-THING.
SOME TALES SAY THAT THE CHILD GROWS HEAVIER UNTIL IT CRUSHES WHOEVER TAKES IT, WHILE OTHERS SAY THE PERSON WILL FALL ILL, BUT IT'S LIKELY THAT THESE ELEMENTS WERE LATER ADDITIONS TO THE STORY.
IN SOME VARIATIONS, THE PERSON WHO TAKES THE CHILD GAINS SUPER-NATURAL STRENGTH.
HM. BUT ABOUT A HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE TORIYAMA SEKIEN PAINTED THAT PICTURE, THERE WAS A WAVE OF UBUME PANIC IN THIS COUNTRY.
IN 1713, A VERSION OF THE UBUME LEGEND WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "RECORD OF ONE HUNDRED GHOST STORIES."

I THINK THAT VERSION IS SCARIER THAN THE PAINTING, PERSONALLY.
YOU MEMORIZE ALL OF THIS USELESS INFORMATION? YOU MUST HAVE A LOT OF TIME ON YOUR HANDS.
WHEN A PREGNANT WOMAN DIES HER LOVE FOR HER CHILD MANIFESTS AS AN UBUME
THE UBUME APPEARS AS A WOMAN SOAKED IN BLOOD FROM THE WAIST DOWN AND SHE MAKES A WARBLING SOUND LIKE A BIRD.
HUH?
BUT IN THE PAINTING, SHE JUST LOOKS LIKE A WOMAN WHO WAS CAUGHT OUT IN THE RAIN.
SHE'S MORE SAD THAN FRIGHTENING, ISN'T SHE?
WAVE
WAVE
AH, AND IN OLDER TALES FROM SOME REGIONS, THE UBUME IS CALLED AN "UGUME."
MUCH LIKE IN THE "RECORD OF ONE HUNDRED GHOST STORIES," THE "UGUME" ARE SOAKED IN BLOOD FROM THE WAIST DOWN, BUT THEY'RE ALSO COVERED IN WOUNDS.
THAT VERSION IS EVEN BETTER!

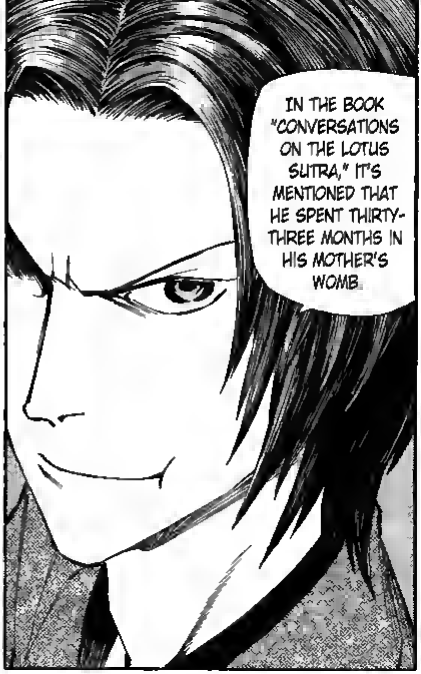
LOOK.
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. IT'S A MONO-CHROME ILLUS-TRATION.
BUT I COULD HAVE SWORN THAT SHE WAS COVERED IN BRIGHT RED BLOOD WHEN I LOOKED AT THE PAINTING...

I COULD HAVE SWORN IT WAS RED...
BUT...
HUH?
It must have been a trick of the light
...WELL, THE UBUME LEGEND MAY HAVE LOST ITS RELEVANCE TO THE MODERN WORLD, BUT AS USUAL, YOUR BRAIN IS STUCK IN THE PAST.
jingle


THAT'S BLASPHEMY, YOU KNOW.
YOU'RE GOING STRAIGHT TO HELL.
WOULD YOU LIKE A BUDDHA BONE?
HA HA!
NON-SENSE, I'M A SAINT.
OR MAYBE THE BUDDHA IS A BAD EXAMPLE...
THIS CANDY HAD A VERY INTERESTING LIFE AS SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA!
INCIDENTALLY, THE BUDDHA HAD STRANGE BIRTH AS WELL.
WHAT ABOUT TAIRA NO MASA-KADO?
HUH?
CHOMP

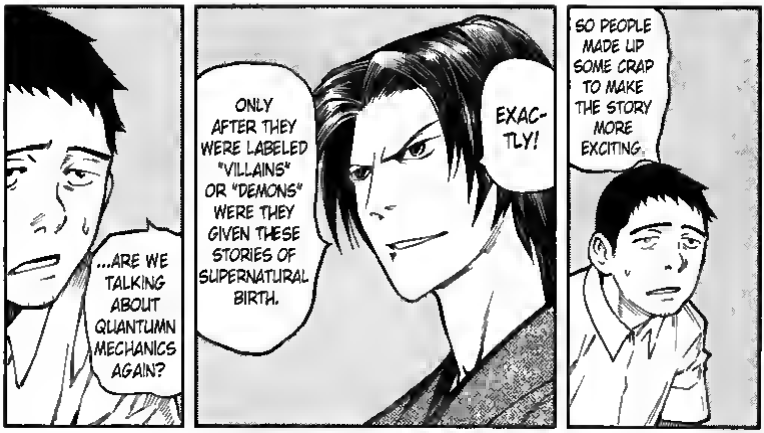
NOTE The Buddha was born as the prince Siddhartha Gautama of India. According to legend, his mother had a divine vision when he was conceived, but she died in childbirth. Taira no Masakado was a 10th century Japanese warlord who lead a rebellion against the Emperor. In the legends, it's said that his mother was a serpent, and that her magic protected him.

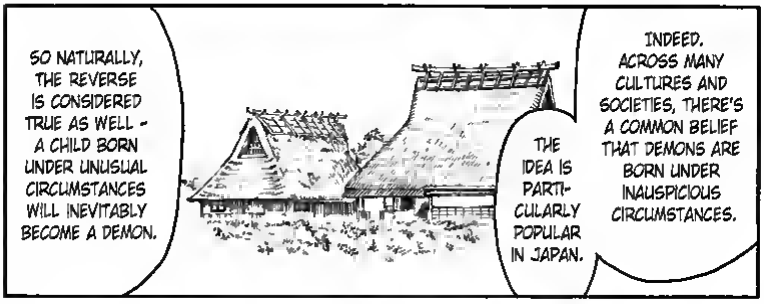
"Hey, Kyougokudou... do you think it's possible for a woman to be pregnant for 20 months?"



AND IN "LEGENDS OF THE KEICHOU ERA," THERE'S THE STORY OF A CRIMINAL CALLED OOTORI ICHIBEI. WHEN HE WAS FINALLY THROWN IN PRISON, HE CLAIMED THAT HE'D BEEN IN THE WOMB FOR 18 MONTHS TOO.
MUSASHINO BENKEI IS ANOTHER FAMOUS ONE.
ACCORDING TO THE "RECORDS OF YOSHITSUNE," HE SPENT EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN THE WOMB, WHILE "THE TALE OF BENKEI" CLAIMS THAT HE WAS IN THERE FOR THREE YEARS AND THREE MONTHS
HE WAS BORN WITH TEETH AND A FULL HEAD OF HAIR, SO THEY CALLED HIM A DEMON CHILD
...THEY'RE ALL VILLAINS.
IN "THE DOUJI OF IBUKI," IT'S SAID THAT HE WAS BORN AFTER THIRTY-THREE MONTHS, WHILE "BEFORE THE TIMES OF PEACE" SAYS THAT HE WAS BORN AFTER SIXTEEN MONTHS.
SPEAKING OF VILLAINS, WHAT ABOUT SHUTEN DOUJI?
WELL, BENKEI WASN'T A BAD GUY... HE JUST LIKED A GOOD FIGHT.
BUT YOU DO HAVE A POINT.

NOTE Benkei was a warrior monk and famous wild man who served Minamoto no Yoshitsune, a legendary 12th century general. Shuten Douji was born a human child, but in various versions of the folk tale he's tempted by evil and is transformed into a monster who rampages through Kyoto.


...ARE WE TALKING ABOUT QUANTUMN MECHANICS AGAIN?
ONLY AFTER THEY WERE LABELED "VILLAINS" OR "DEMONS" WERE THEY GIVEN THESE STORIES OF SUPERNATURAL BIRTH.
EXAC-TLY!
SO PEOPLE MADE UP SOME CRAP TO MAKE THE STORY MORE EXCITING.


SO NATURALLY, THE REVERSE IS CONSIDERED TRUE AS WELL - A CHILD BORN UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES WILL INEVITABLY BECOME A DEMON.
THE IDEA IS PARTI-CULARLY POPULAR IN JAPAN.
INDEED. ACROSS MANY CULTURES AND SOCIETIES, THERE'S A COMMON BELIEF THAT DEMONS ARE BORN UNDER INAUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

OF COURSE, THERE'S NO ACTUAL EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT EVERY CHILD WITH A STRANGE BIRTH WILL BECOME A DEMON.
THE PAST IS WRITTEN BY THE PRESENT.
THAT'S WHY THERE ARE SO MANY CASES WHERE BAD MEN HAVE BEEN GIVEN THESE SUPER-NATURAL ORIGIN STORIES.

AREN'T THERE ANY CASES WHERE SOMEONE HAD A STRANGE BIRTH BUT GREW UP TO BE PERFECTLY NORMAL?
NOPE. BACK IN THOSE DAYS, SUCH CHILDREN WERE SIMPLY KILLED.
BUT SHUTEN DOUJI SURVIVED, DIDN'T HE?
IF THEY REALLY KILLED OFF EVERY STRANGE CHILD, THEN HOW DID ALL OF THE FAIRY-TALE BAD GUYS REACH ADULTHOOD?
LIKE I SAID BEFORE, THE LEGEND OF SHUTEN DOUJI'S BIRTH WAS SOMETHING RETROACTIVELY ADDED TO THE STORY.
BUT PEOPLE WOULD STILL SAY THINGS LIKE "IF ONLY THAT CHILD HAD BEEN KILLED, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!"
AND IF BY HANCE THERE WAS A CHILD BORN UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHO DID GROW TO BE A NORMAL ADULT, THEN HISTORY WOULD SIMPLY ERASE ALL MEMORY OF THEIR STRANGE BIRTH.

Ah... I think I understand.
.....

I could have ruined an innocent kid's life.
If I had written another trashy magazine article about a "demon child."

YOU'RE RIGHT...
sigh

BUT WHO TOLD YOU THIS RIDICULOUS STORY IN THE FIRST PLACE?

WELL, HAVE I CHANGED YOUR MIND?
WHILE WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND THE COLLECTIVE DELUSIONS OF THE PAST, WE SHOULDN'T TWIST THEM TO OUR OWN MODERN CONVENIENCE.

YOUR SISTER.

ATSU-KO...

PFF!

Atsuko-kun would say that her brother is the brat of the family...
OH, NOTHING...
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
I'LL WIPE THAT SMIRK OFF YOUR FACE!

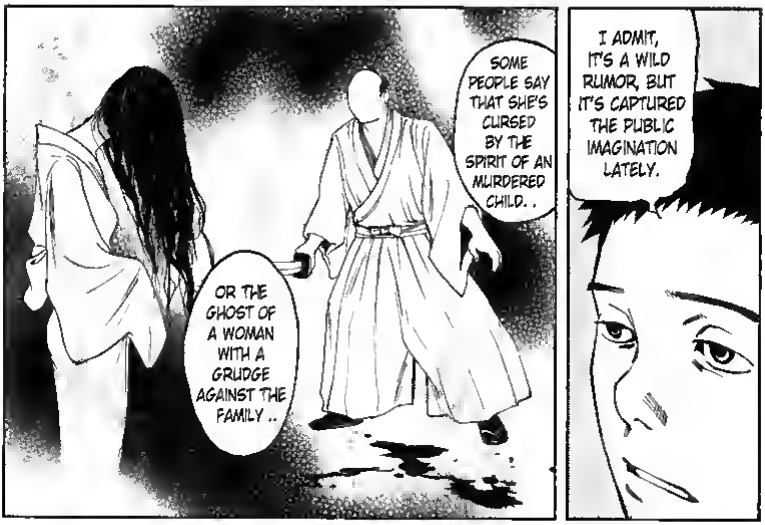
THAT DELIN-QUENT BRAT...

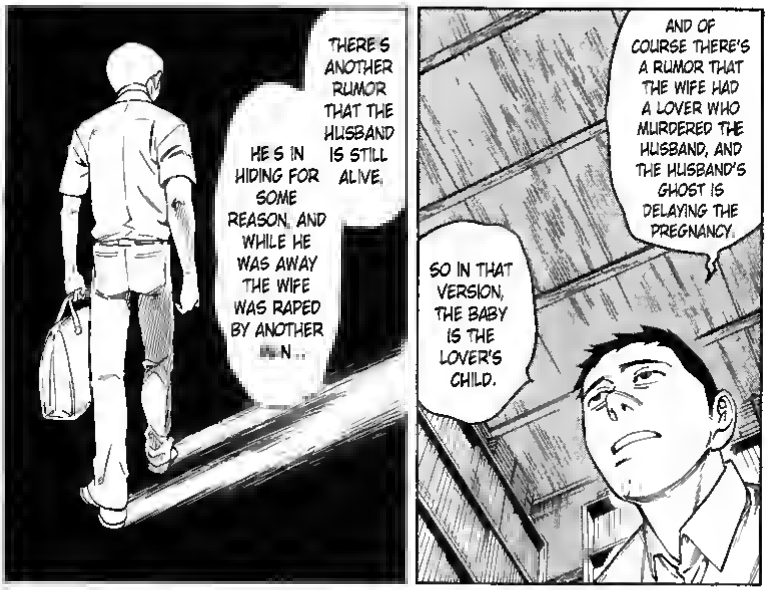
Kyougoku-dou's sister is named Chuuzenji Atsuko
She's a bright and lively girl - the total opposite of her brother!
After high school, she studied hard and was admitted to an elite women's college but she quit soon after, because it was too boring!
NOTE The sign says "Kitansha Publishing"
These days, she's working as a writer and editor for a magazine company in Kanda
I get a lot of writing jobs from her.
DON'T WORRY, ATSUKO-KUN WASN'T DOING A STORY ON THE PREGNANT WOMAN OR ANYTHING.
YOUR SISTER WOULDN'T WRITE ANYTHING THAT TASTELESS.

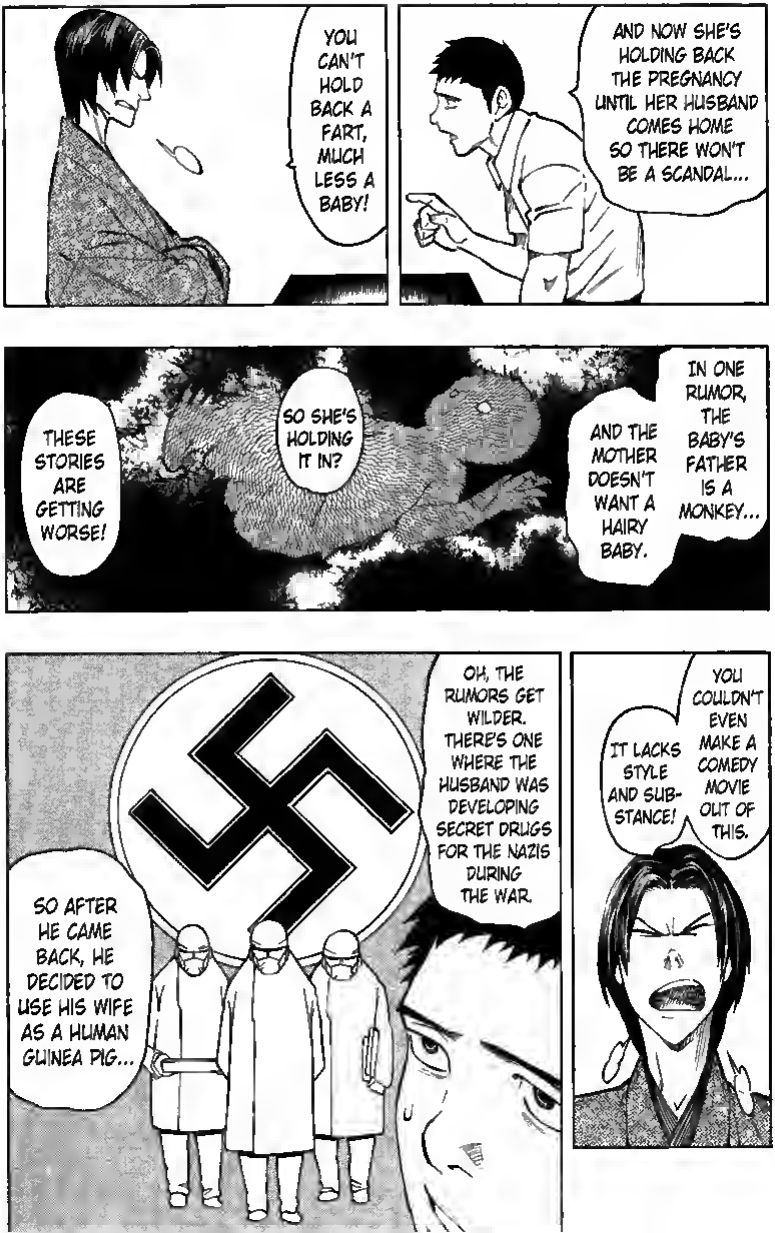
WAIT, IT'S A GOOD STORY, SO LET ME FINISH!
YOU SEE...
SHE WAS DOING A STORY ON THE HUSBAND - HE DISAPPEARED A YEAR AND A HALF AGO
A RUNAWAY HUSBAND DOESN'T SOUND LIKE HEADLINE NEWS.
...HE DISAPPEARED FROM A SEALED ROOM LIKE A PUFF OF SMOKE!?
YOUR SISTER MENTIONED IT TO ME SINCE I'VE WRITTEN A COUPLE OF DETECTIVE STORIES, SO I DECIDED TO DO SOME INVESTIGATING OF MY OWN
OKAY, IT SOUNDS KIND OF CORNY, BUT WHAT IF IT'S TRUE?
THIS SOUNDS LIKE ONE OF YOUR THIRD-RATE DETECTIVE STORIES!
HUFF

AND I'M SURE THEY APPEALED TO YOUR AWFUL TASTES.
ATSUKO MUST HAVE BEEN DESPERATE FOR A STORY IF SHE CAME TO YOU ABOUT IT.
SHE'D BE BETTER OFF GOING TO ONE OF THOSE FORTUNE-TELLERS IN ASAKUSA.
ANYWAY, THE MORE I HEARD ABOUT IT, THE WEIRDER THE WIFE'S STORY SOUNDED, SO I STARTED ASKING AROUND.
THERE ARE ALREADY A LOT OF RUMORS SPREADING...
BUT SEKIGUCHI-KUN, THERE'S AN OBVIOUS EXPLANATION STARING YOU RIGHT IN THE FACE
SHE MUST HAVE HAD A MAN ON THE SIDE AFTER HER HUSBAND DISAPPEARED.. THEN SHE GOT KNOCKED UP AND LIED ABOUT IT.
THE WOMAN'S HUSBAND HAS BEEN MISSING FOR A YEAR AND A HALF, SO PEOPLE COOKED UP A STORY ABOUT A 20-MONTH PREGNANCY.
ALRIGHT, I SEE THE LOGIC HERE.
He's interested.
AND SO WE ENDED UP WITH THIS STUPID STORY.
BUT STILL...
I THOUGHT OF THAT, BUT SHE WAS 3 MONTHS PREGNANT WHEN HE DISAPPEARED.
AND SHE'S FROM A GOOD FAMILY.
HE EVEN TOOK HER SURNAME.

53 **NOTE** It used to be fairly common for wealthy families with no male heir to formally adopt a son-in-law, so the husband would take the wife's surname and become the official heir to a higher-status family..


I ADMIT, IT'S A WILD RUMOR, BUT IT'S CAPTURED THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION LATELY.
SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT SHE'S CURSED BY THE SPIRIT OF AN MURDERED CHILD. .
OR THE GHOST OF A WOMAN WITH A GRUDGE AGAINST THE FAMILY ..


AND OF COURSE THERE'S A RUMOR THAT THE WIFE HAD A LOVER WHO MURDERED THE HUSBAND, AND THE HUSBAND'S GHOST IS DELAYING THE PREGNANCY.
SO IN THAT VERSION, THE BABY IS THE LOVER'S CHILD.
THERE'S ANOTHER RUMOR THAT THE HUSBAND IS STILL ALIVE.
HE'S IN HIDING FOR SOME REASON, AND WHILE HE WAS AWAY THE WIFE WAS RAPED BY ANOTHER MAN ..


YOU CAN'T HOLD BACK A FART, MUCH LESS A BABY!
AND NOW SHE'S HOLDING BACK THE PREGNANCY UNTIL HER HUSBAND COMES HOME SO THERE WON'T BE A SCANDAL...
THESE STORIES ARE GETTING WORSE!
SO SHE'S HOLDING IT IN?
AND THE MOTHER DOESN'T WANT A HAIRY BABY.
IN ONE RUMOR, THE BABY'S FATHER IS A MONKEY...
SO AFTER HE CAME BACK, HE DECIDED TO USE HIS WIFE AS A HUMAN GUINEA PIG...
OH, THE RUMORS GET WILDER. THERE'S ONE WHERE THE HUSBAND WAS DEVELOPING SECRET DRUGS FOR THE NAZIS DURING THE WAR.
IT LACKS STYLE AND SUB-STANCE!
YOU COULDN'T EVEN MAKE A COMEDY MOVIE OUT OF THIS.

IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?
THEY SAY THAT HE WAS REALLY TRYING TO USE HUMAN CELLS TO CREATE A CLONE.
THE POINT WASN'T TO DELAY BIRTH.
WHO WOULD WANT TO DELAY A BIRTH?
WHAT'S THE POINT?
THEO-RETICALLY, YES.
BUT RUMORS AREN'T LIMITED BY TRUTH.
THAT THE CHILD IN HER BELLY IS ADOLF HITLER HIMSELF.
ACTUALLY, SOME PEOPLE ARE SAYING...
BUT WE DON'T HAVE THE TECH-NOLOGY.
MAYBE IN A HUNDRED YEARS.
NO MORE!!

Even though I kinda believed it too...
HAHA... YEAH...
WHEN I THINK THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY BELIEVE THIS CRAP, I JUST WANT TO CURL UP AND DIE
I DON'T KNOW, BUT BACK THEN THEY WERE COURT PHYSICIANS TO SOME SAMURAI LORD IN SHIKOKU.
DID OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY EVEN EXIST BACK THEN?
THEIR CLINIC HAS BEEN AROUND SINCE THE 1700S
WELL... SHE'S THE DAUGHTER OF AN OBSTE-TRICIAN
SO WHO IS THIS POOR WOMAN THEY'RE SPREADING RUMORS ABOUT?
DURING THE EARLY SHOWA ERA, THEY WERE DOING INTERNAL MEDICINE AND SURGERY, BUT BUSINESS WENT BAD AFTER THE WAR WITH CHINA AND NOW THEY ONLY DO OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY.
AFTER THE MEIJI RESTO-RATION, THE LORD MOVED TO TOKYO, SO THE FAMILY SET UP A SMALL HOSPITAL HERE.

57 **NOTE** The Meiji Restoration refers to the restoration of Imperial rule that occurred in 1868. The Showa Era refers to the rule of Emperor Hirohito from 1926 to 1989. Obstetrics is a branch of medicine that deals with pregnancy and childbirth.

SO THEY FOUND A BOY FROM A TOP MEDICAL UNIVERSITY, AND HE MARRIED THE DAUGHTER.
BUT THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BREAK THE FAMILY TRADITION.
SO THEY PROBABLY DIDN'T HAVE ANY DECENT DOCTORS LEFT,
THE FAMILY ESTABLISHED THEIR MEDICAL PRACTICE AGES AGO...
BUT MEDICINE HAS CHANGED A LOT IN THAT TIME
RUMORS ARE SPREADING.
THAT'S RIGHT.
AND NOW THE GIRL HAS DEVELOPED SOME BIZARRE ILLNESS AND CAN'T GIVE BIRTH
SO HE'S THE ONE WHO DISAPPEARED?
.....
?
IT'S A TOUGH SITUATION...
BUT SINCE THE FAMILY RUNS A WELL-ESTABLISHED CLINIC THAT SPECIALIZES IN PREGNANCY, THEY CAN'T JUST SEND HER TO SOME OTHER HOSPITAL.

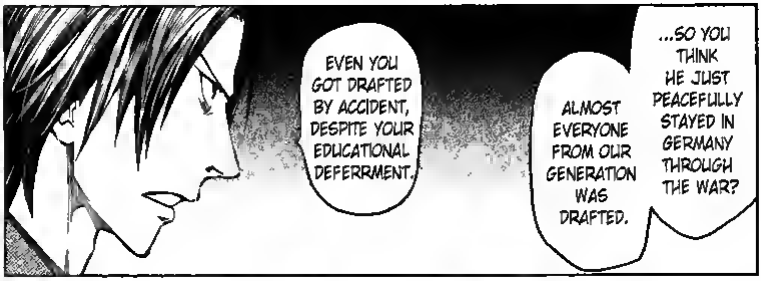
HEY, CAN I GET SOME MORE TEA...?
SEKI-GUCHI-KUN...
Did I say too much ..?
THIS CLINIC...
COULD IT BE THE KUONJI CLINIC IN ZOSHI-GAYA?
AND THE ADOPTED SON-IN-LAW WHO DIS-APPEARED... WAS HIS NAME MAKIO...?

?
WELL I FEEL SILLY NOW...
WHAT? YOU KNEW ABOUT THE RUMORS ALL ALONG?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
HUH?
MAYBE YOU SHOULD JUST GIVE UP ON YOUR USELESS BRAIN.
GRR
YOU REALLY DON'T REMEMBER, DO YOU?

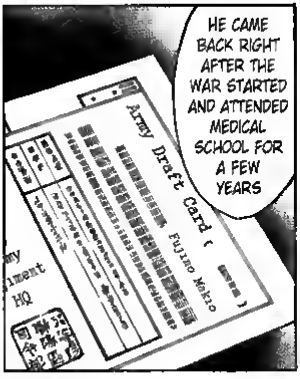
KUONJI MAKIO.
FORMERLY FUJINO MAKIO.
NICKNAMED "FUJIMAKI."
YOU DON'T REMEMBER HIM AT ALL?

AH...

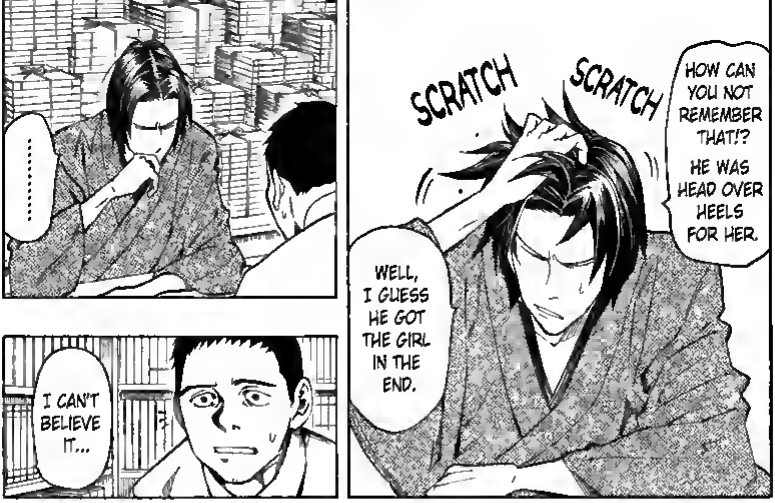
FUJIMAKI? THAT FUJIMAKI!?
I REMEMBER HIM FROM HIGH SCHOOL... HE WAS A GRADE AHEAD OF US...
BUT I THOUGHT HE WENT TO GERMANY!

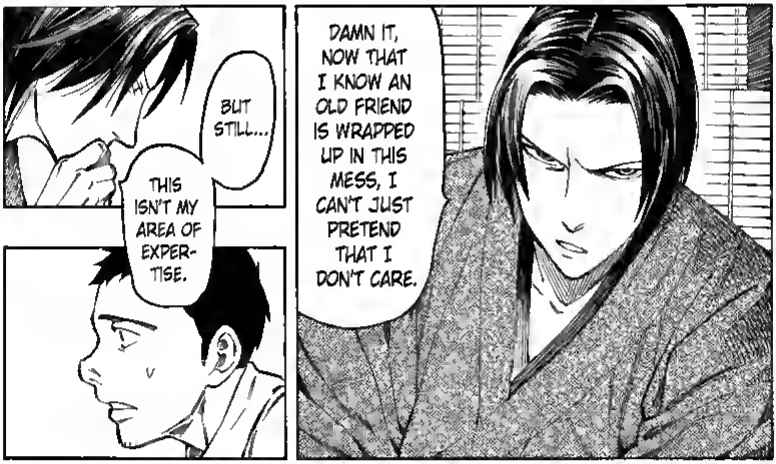

...SO YOU THINK HE JUST PEACEFULLY STAYED IN GERMANY THROUGH THE WAR?
ALMOST EVERYONE FROM OUR GENERATION WAS DRAFTED.
EVEN YOU GOT DRAFTED BY ACCIDENT, DESPITE YOUR EDUCATIONAL DEFERRMENT.

THEN HE GRADUATED AND GOT HIS MEDICAL LICENSE...
HE ENLISTED WHEN THINGS GOT BAD, BUT LUCKILY THE WAR ENDED BEFORE HE WAS SENT TO SIBERIA, SO HE CAME BACK AND FINISHED SCHOOL.


HE CAME BACK RIGHT AFTER THE WAR STARTED AND ATTENDED MEDICAL SCHOOL FOR A FEW YEARS
Army Draft Card (

AND THEN HE WAS ADOPTED INTO THE KUONJI FAMILY?
WHOA... I CAN'T BELIVE IT...
THAT'S RIGHT! BACK WHEN WE WERE IN SCHOOL, FUJIMAKI FELL IN LOVE WITH SOME GIRL, RIGHT?
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN FROM THAT CLINIC...
THAT EXPLAINS WHERE THE RUMOR ABOUT NAZIS CAME FROM
I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM IN YEARS, BUT I DIDN'T THINK HE'D JUST DISAPPEAR...
THAT'S RIGHT. SHE WAS A KUONJI.
IT WAS IN THE SUMMER OF 1939...
HE MET HER WHILE WE WERE ALL OUT AT THE KISHIMOJIN FESTIVAL.

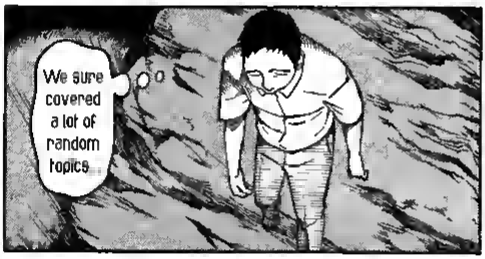

.....
SCRATCH
SCRATCH
HOW CAN YOU NOT REMEMBER THAT!?
HE WAS HEAD OVER HEELS FOR HER.
WELL, I GUESS HE GOT THE GIRL IN THE END.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT...


BUT STILL...
THIS ISN'T MY AREA OF EXPER-TISE.
DAMN IT, NOW THAT I KNOW AN OLD FRIEND IS WRAPPED UP IN THIS MESS, I CAN'T JUST PRETEND THAT I DON'T CARE.

.....

HE WAS IN THE SAME CLASS AS FUJIMAKI, IN HIGH SCHOOL, SO HE MIGHT KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM THAN I DO.
YOU SHOULD GO TALK TO THAT IDIOT DETECTIVE.
.....
YOU DRAGGED ME INTO THIS...
SO I EXPECT YOU TO DO YOUR PART.

I WILL.
SEE YOU LATER!
Who still uses lanterns these days?
FINE, BUT WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING.
THAT HILL IS STEEPER THAN IT LOOKS.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT A LANTERN?
I'M FINE, I'M FINE.
THE MOON IS PLENTY BRIGHT.


We sure covered a lot of random topics...

Ubume,
Demon children,
Quantum mechanics...
The brain,
Ghosts...

For instance, what's on the other side of that wall?
We can't know what the world is doing when we're not observing it.
According to quantum mechanics...
Maybe nothing exists beyond what I can see.
What's at the end of that road?

In the darkness, anything is possible...
I can't see my feet!
CRASH

What if the ubume really exists?
What if she's standing behind me right now?

What if I turn around and see her?
There's probably nothing there... but what if she's real?
GASP

There's a...
Non-zero probability...
...Only when you observe something does it become real.
That's right...

If the world isn't real...
Then mysterious things wouldn't be strange at all...
What if the world I see is just an illusion?
No, that's not possible I've been walking down this hill for years, right?
But wait... how do I know I'm really here?

THERE ARE NO MYSTERIES IN THIS WORLD,
SEKIGUCHI-KUN.
STUMBLE